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Senate votes to keep sexual predators out of the classroom

LANSING – Sex offenders would be stopped from working in schools under legislation that passed the Michigan Senate today, announced Sen. Wayne Kuipers, R-Holland.

“Children should think of school as a safe place,” said Kuipers, who chairs the Senate Education Committee, which took up some of the legislation. “We have to prevent sex offenders from entering classrooms and abusing children. Recent news reports have made it clear that existing law aren’t sufficient.”

The Senate approved parts of the Student Safety Initiative on Wednesday. Senate-sponsored bills in the package were passed earlier and are before the House of Representatives for consideration. Kuipers has introduced Senate Bill 610, which deals with suspending the teaching abilities of those convicted of sex crimes. The bill has passed the Senate.

“Parents should have every assurance that the schools where they send their children are the safest possible places,” said Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming. “No predator belongs in our schools, in our daycare centers or anywhere near our children. The work we did today will help give parents some much-needed peace of mind.”

The Student Safety Initiative includes:

- Requiring background checks on all paid school and day-care center employees and prohibiting anyone with a sex offense from being employed;
- Creating Student Safety Zones by prohibiting convicted sex offenders from living, working or loitering within 1,000 feet of a school;
- Revoking teaching certification for convicted sex offenders; and
- Requiring all school employees to self-report any criminal charge to their school district and to the Department of Education.

The Student Safety Initiative is a bicameral effort that comes on the heels of a series of reports in the Detroit News showing repeated cases of sex offenders being allowed access to children in Michigan schools. At least 35 Michigan school employees, a majority of whom are teachers, have been charged or convicted of sexual misconduct in recent months, according to recent news reports.

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